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RUSSIA FINDING HER FEET

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON

THE best Russian news of the month comes to us, oddly enough, from an authentically German source. The Cologne *Volkszeitung*, commenting on the appointment of General Alexei Brusiloff to supreme command of the Russian armies, writes: "Brusiloff is a man who hesitates at no sacrifice. His nomination proves that the temporary Government means seriously its announcement of a new offensive. It has chosen for the highest command a general who is responsible for the greatest successes yet achieved by the Russians. We shall do well to reckon seriously with this new offensive on the Russian front. Our Western enemies apparently have been successful in holding Russia to her course, and the new Russia will be tested by this offensive." The Cologne paper goes on to prophesy: "The German army leaders have made their preparations accordingly. The Russian offensive will not be successful, and may even bring peace a considerable distance nearer."

We may ignore the gilding of the pill, contenting ourselves with seeing in the *Volkszeitung's* declaration the proof that Germany has definitely given up hope of a separate peace with Russia and expects instead a vigorous attack by Russia's hardest hitting general. It would, of course, have been exceedingly desirable that this offensive should have begun in March or April, synchronizing with the French, English, and Italian forward movements, but there are immense natural difficulties in the way of an early Spring attack in Western Russia and Galicia because of the deep, late-melting snows and the bottomless morass of mud which the snow leaves behind it, quite impracticable for artillery movements; and it will be remembered that General Brusiloff's great offensive last year, in its way the most

noteworthy aggressive action which the Allies have yet made, began as late as June 4. And since in Volhynia and Galicia a late Spring has its compensation in an equally late Winter, there is still plenty of time for a great campaign that may prove decisive in the winning of the war and may, in fact, bring peace nearer, though not quite the peace the German journal has in view.

There have been causes of misgiving in the general situation, created by the Russian leaders themselves. One of the most alarming and, at the same time, most dangerous was the relaxation, almost destruction, of military discipline by an order issued by Gutchkoff, then Minister of War. It is worth while to analyze his motives. First, there was a genuine and very sound desire to assimilate the discipline of the Russian army to that of the magnificent citizen army of France, where order and obedience rest on the voluntary self-subordination of the soldiers and where the finest discipline in the world co-exists with the most cordial mutual affection. Take the incident quoted in Barrie's war play: Volunteers were asked for a highly dangerous air exploit. Of the many aviators who at once stepped forward three were chosen. They saluted the commander-in-chief and were setting forth. But Marshal Joffre called them back: "Children when taking leave embrace their father!" And he embraced them in turn, with the splendid simplicity of heart so easy for a Frenchman. Some such ideal as that was in Gutchkoff's mind. But his second motive was less praiseworthy. It was the not very courageous desire to conciliate the extremists and agitators in the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, some of whom seem to act under direct German inspiration. So we had the perilous order of April 30, which had, however, its admirable side. Thus it decreed that thenceforth all Russian soldiers should retain the full rights of citizenship; that freedom of speech and worship should be guaranteed to them, as in the French army. But, on the other hand, there were the very unfortunate clauses making the salute optional and creating committees of the men in each company, battalion and regiment to safeguard discipline and to settle disputes between the men and their officers; clauses which the men interpreted as permission to go as they pleased.

These last clauses simply copy the declarations of the

famous "Order No. 1," issued without the slightest authority by someone claiming to represent the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates—in all likelihood, as was openly surmised in France, inspired by a clever German agent.

Immediately there was a complete relaxation of discipline in the field army. It is freely said in Russia that the famous generals, seeing the extreme danger involved, instantly telegraphed to Minister Gutchkoff saying, in effect, that if he had the slightest regard for Russia's honor this unfortunate order must be revoked or modified in such a way as to make the re-establishment of discipline possible. What is certain is that General Alexeieff, General Ruzski, General Brusiloff, and other army chiefs immediately went to Petrograd "to confer with the Provisional Government," and that the resignation of Gutchkoff quickly followed. We are reasonably safe in assuming that the two events were not unconnected; that the resignation of Gutchkoff under pressure was the first step in a clearly conceived plan to restore the discipline that is indispensable to success.

About the same time—and this is one of the facts which has not had due consideration in this country—a general alliance of military and naval officers was constituted in Petrograd, "with the aim of assisting the high command to reorganize the army on the new basis, for the attainment"; with the further aim, we may conjecture, of offsetting the famous Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates.

There followed the May Day demonstrations, in which small groups of anarchists, carrying black flags and heavily armed, paraded the streets of the capital, murdering, among others, the valiant General Kashtalinski and trying, evidently once more under German guidance, to establish the reign of chaos. There was a hurried meeting of the Executive Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, which passed a strong resolution declaring that "only madmen or enemies of national liberty are capable of such revolting acts; the Executive Committee condemns them severely."

On May 2 General Brusiloff published his famous general order forbidding "fraternization" between Russian and enemy soldiers and declaring that "the enemy is seeking to establish such relations and is taking advantage of them to gain information as to the organization of the Russian

defenses." Correspondents have described this "fraternization," made easy by the childlike simplicity of the young Russian soldiers, who, believing that the millenium has come, are somewhat too ready to "love their enemies": Members of the German and Austrian staff corps, speaking Russian fluently, have masqueraded as privates and invited Russian soldiers to come over to the enemy trenches, dining and wining them and asking tenderly about their welfare. Then there were return parties given in the Russian trenches, when the visitors brought little cameras to take interesting photographs "for the dear, white-haired parents at home," which photographs included Russian batteries in the background. Officers who interfered were told that in accordance with the luckless Gutchkoff order discipline was now entrusted to the soldiers themselves, therefore the officers had no right to interfere. But for the grave danger to the Allied cause there would be an element of humor in this grotesque situation.

At this time also the German agents in Petrograd and their allies and dupes among the extreme Socialists there were making demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd calling for the resignation of the Provisional Government and demanding the immediate downfall of Paul Milyukoff, then Minister for Foreign Affairs. These were immediately swamped by gigantic demonstrations in favor of the Provisional Government, but at the same time the German agents succeeded in inoculating the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates with the now famous formula, "Peace without annexations, expropriations, or contributions." The Tifis agitator, Tshéidze, elected himself sponsor of this formula, which is palpably the ruse of a beaten Germany. "After this explanation is published," he declared, "and the Allies are informed of its contents, the proletariat classes in the Allied countries must take similar steps to make their Governments repudiate such intentions."

The reply of England, the splendid answer of Premier Ribot, are already a part of history. What should be known is that a very strong pronouncement, exactly in the tenor of Ribot's speech, was made in Petrograd by G. V. Plekhanoff, one of the returned exiles, who said with striking cogency:

As to the conquest, I have already more than once expressed my

view. The formula, "Peace without annexations or contributions," is untenable. It is the ratification by the Germans of the annexations made by them. For the Germans, not we, seek conquests.

The second part of the formula is unintelligible. Contributions have been exacted by the Germans from the Belgians in enormous sums. We have not levied contributions from the Germans. Is it possible that, by accepting this formula, we should agree that Germany, having crushed Belgium under foot, should not pay for the damage she has done? Not to demand from the Central Powers reparation for their destruction of small nations would be dishonorable. Just at present the people of the Ukraine (Galicia) are beginning to declare that they wish to unite with Russia. Shall we prevent them? Or the Armenians, on whom they are trying to reimpose a Turkish protectorate, and who do not want that protectorate, why should we refuse to support their wish to separate from Turkey? The formula, "Peace without annexations or contributions," in my view, will not stand examination. Though it is prompted by the love of peace, yet in reality it is highly advantageous for aggressive countries—contrary to the intention of its authors.

We beg leave to doubt the last phrase. We are convinced that its authors are to be found in Berlin; it is merely the translation into villainous Russian ("Mir bez anexiy i kontributiyy" of Count Czernin's proposal "the status before the war." But the point is that this Russian revolutionary argued exactly as Ribot and Lord Robert Cecil argued—and that his pronouncement came the first of the three. This is one of the things the cable companies unaccountably missed.

Another, which failed to "get across," is really one of the finest documents that have come out of Russia, at once touching and inspiring. It is the declaration of the Russian Tenth Army, with headquarters at Minsk, in the form of Resolutions addressed to the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates at Petrograd:

Comrades, the past cannot return. We are all ready to defend with our breasts the liberty of our land against every assault of violence. We beg you not to offer to the army regulations that might be understood as acts of independent organization, since such regulations bring dislocations and disorders into the life of the active army. Comrades, we hail your victory in the struggle against capitalism for the eight-hour work-day—but we remind you that the regiments and battalions stand in painful and dangerous positions, without limitation of hours. Coming here from the battle front, we were thunderstruck when we learned that the output of the munition

factories was dwindling, as intensive work is also dwindling. Comrades, is it possible that the holiday-making of the Revolution has not ended yet? Surely, it is time to work. Do you not know that, for every hour needlessly spent in idleness, your comrades, there on the front, will pay with their lives?

We know that Wilhelm is still on the throne; we know that the German workman is toiling day and night at the preparation of shells. We know that the German people still send us poison gas and explosive bullets. Is it possible, then, that free Russia will leave our free army, in its struggle against German imperialism, without shells and supplies? We summon you, comrades, to strain all your forces; to increase the intensity of your work to the utmost, in order to supply to our army all things needed to carry the war to an end, to a peace that shall guarantee liberty to all peoples. Comrades! Each to his place: the workmen at their lathes, the soldiers in the trenches, and—long live free Russia!

There is the authentic voice of the Russian army to set against the inflammatory lucubrations of the Tsheidzes.

We may, as a measure of reassurance, quote a statement concerning the present shell supply of the Russian army: As compared with the supply in the first period of the war—the period of the battle of Lublin and the first invasion of East Prussia, in September, 1914—Russia has at present three times as many shells. Shells for heavy guns were then one-twelfth of the total; they are now one-ninth of the total. That is, there are now three times as many shells for field guns and four times as many shells for heavy guns as there were then, on the eve of the first large Russian offensives. Further, we are told that each month's output of shells is equal to one-fifth of the total now with the batteries and in the storerooms, while one-fourth of each month's output consists of heavy shells. There is, therefore, on hand material sufficient for a formidable offensive.

The ministerial crisis at Petrograd was clearly and amply reported by cable. The highly important results which it brought about may be summarized thus: First, it greatly strengthened the position of the Provisional Government in its relations with the sometimes menacing Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, in part by including in a coalition ministry some of the ablest members of the latter. Second, it resulted in firmly establishing an ardent militant, Kerenski, in the War Office—a man of eloquence and fire, of firm will, and wholly in accord with the great fighting generals of the Russian army. Kerenski

had his hours of agony and despair. On May 13 he was recorded as saying: "I am sorry that I did not die two months ago, when the dream of a new life was growing in the hearts of the Russian people, when I was sure that the country could govern itself without the whip." A week later, firmly in the saddle at the War Ministry, Kerenski was issuing orders that "Deserters are enjoined to return to the army and fleet by May 28. All infractions of this order will be severely punished. I propose to introduce an iron discipline into the army."

The juxtaposition of those two declarations is one of the dramatic things of the Russian revolution. At about the same time there was a notable declaration from the Cossacks in the Russian army declaring that they were unanimously for the prosecution of the war to complete victory over the Germans; that they had never been guilty of "fraternizing"; that they regretted that they were not all at one point, where they could make a strong offensive; that among them desertions were unknown.

This makes it timely to say something about this splendid body of men, who have been too generally caricatured as wielding the knout against the Russian peasants, but who are, in reality, one of the most courageous, self-reliant, tenacious fighting forces in the world.

The Cossacks are a hereditary military caste, descended from the fighting men who fought the Turks in what is now Southern Russia in the old days of fire and sword. They have, perhaps, a strain of the old Scythian blood in them, making them more rugged than the pure Slavs. At present they hold extensive lands by military tenure and are liable to service for life. They are almost entirely mounted troops, providing their own horses and equipment. Beginning at the age of nineteen, the young Cossacks are trained at home by the older men for two years. They then serve in the "first category" for four years and may be employed in any part of the wide Russian dominion. They continue, for periods of four years each, in two further "categories," and finally enter the Cossack reserves, to serve in time of war. Squadrons of Cossacks are attached to each infantry division; brigades of Cossacks are attached to each cavalry division. In a sense they form the backbone of the Russian army. During the Galician campaigns there was one service performed only by Cossacks: They made their

way, at infinite hazard, through the enemy lines, where the extension of these through immense forests and morasses made this possible, and devoted themselves to perilous attacks upon the rear and the communication lines of the Austrians and Germans, inflicting severe punishment and endlessly harassing the Teutons. In large numbers they volunteered for this dangerous service, each man knowing for a certainty that short of a miracle he would never return.

The declaration of the Cossacks is, therefore, of the utmost moment. Taken with the appointment of Kerenski to the War Ministry and the bestowal of supreme command on Brusiloff it forms a group of happy omens for the vigorous prosecution of the war to final and sweeping victory.

Before we speak of Kerenski's acts there are certain minor ebullitions which should be commented on. There was the Kronstadt incident, the announcement that the garrison of the island fortress of Kronstadt, in the Gulf of Finland, some twenty miles from Petrograd, had declared itself an independent, autonomous republic and had driven out the representatives of the Provisional Government. The President of the newest republic was a student of chemistry, Anatole Lomanoff, whose brother, a young soldier, was commander-in-chief. The new republic sent emissaries to the garrison of Oranienbaum, on the shore, across three miles of water, summoning them to follow suit and declare their independence. The good people of Oranienbaum replied that if Kronstadt interfered with them they would turn their sixteen-inch guns on the island fortress. The new republic was supposed to be planning an invasion of Petrograd with battleships and cruisers, but no invasion took place, and a few hours later relations with Petrograd were opened, emissaries harangued the Kronstadt republicans, and peace was restored, the complete recognition of the Provisional Government being promised.

As regards the threatened strikes of workmen and clerks in Petrograd and in the southern munition plants, one reads of them at first with hot indignation. Then one remembers that there have been dangerous strikes among munition workers in England; that Paris was on strike a few days ago. And finally one realizes that the demands of these Russian strikers are exceedingly modest: the clerks demand the exorbitant sum of about \$12 a week; the muni-

tion workers a little more. Well, they ought to get it, and then go to work in the splendid spirit urged by that pathetic Voice of the Army.

We have hardly space to say anything about the reported agrarian disorders, but in reality only a small part of Russia has been affected or can be affected—for the simple reason that only a very small proportion of arable land in Russia is held by landlords. From four-fifths to nine-tenths is already in the hands of the peasants, or will be when the imperial demesnes are taken over and distributed. Some of the rest belongs to towns. Only a fraction remains, and only in this fraction can there be agrarian disorders, and such an extraordinary land is Russia that even in the midst of revolution there were no murders; the limited confiscations were carried out “without brutality on the one side, without resistance on the other.”

We come now to the heart of the matter: the possibility of a strong Russian offensive. While there are still grave dangers, while explosive elements, touched off by the active, malignant agencies of Germany, may at any moment blaze into flame, there are, on the other hand, elements distinctly reassuring. The position of the Provisional Government appears decidedly more secure. The Council of Workmen’s and Soldiers’ Delegates seems more reasonable, the inflammatory element losing ground. The strikes are, for the present, composed. Kronstadt has made its peace with the authorities. There is now little talk of separate peace, while the formula, “Peace without annexations or contributions,” has gained a rational meaning.

This is the background. In the foreground stand two figures—Kerenski, the War Minister; Brusiloff, commander-in-chief. The two men are absolutely at one as to the path of honor which Russia must tread; Kerenski, young, ardent, courageous, an orator of genius and a fiery patriot; Brusiloff, who “hesitates at no sacrifices”—it is the word of an enemy, yet a true one; he began by complete self-sacrifice and self-dedication—who in the first months of the war gained a name throughout the world for the brilliant advance with Ruzski up to the base of the Carpathians; who last year directed the strongest offensive Russia has made since the war began, one of the strongest and the most successful in territory won that the Allies have yet accomplished; Brusiloff, the “Iron General,” as they call him in

Russia, whose prestige among Russians is immense; cautious, far-seeing, a master of military science, gifted with the divination that is always a part of military genius, and yet with all his caution swift and resolute in action, one of the hardest hitters in the war.

The latest news from Russia is the best. A mutiny, on the Roumanian frontier, of men under the command of General Stecherbatoff—one of the four army-commanders in the great Brusiloff offensive of 1916—has been resolutely put down by armed force, though, apparently, with no bloodshed. This vigorous action was taken by the co-operation of a committee of loyal soldiers, representing the whole army, and of the General Staff; it is, therefore, a test of the whole army's temper and resolution. The "iron discipline" promised by Kerenski is already bearing excellent fruit; the hand of General Brusiloff, as wise as he is resolute, is already felt.

Excellent results may also be expected from the arrival at Petrograd of the American Commission, headed by Mr. Root. There is already warm admiration and enthusiasm for America among the great loyal majority of Russians, who demand war for victory; and the counsels of a man so strong, so wise, so full of experience in the handling of world affairs, are certain to be welcomed by the men who genuinely represent the new Russia. As we write, the President's message is being greeted with a unanimity of feeling somewhat less complete than had been hoped for. There are dangers in the path, without doubt; but there is wise and resolute force, to meet these dangers.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.